JOURNAL 19 - Persuasion

[**How to Plant Ideas in Someone's Mind**](http://lifehacker.com/5715912/how-to-plant-ideas-in-someones-mind)

**Adam Dachis**

If you've ever been convinced by a salesperson that you truly wanted a product, done something too instinctively, or made choices that seemed entirely out of character, then you've had an idea planted in your mind. Here's how it's done.

*This classic post has been republished is part of our*[*Evil Week*](http://lifehacker.com/welcome-to-lifehackers-fifth-annual-evil-week-1647621043)*series at Lifehacker, where we look at the dark side of getting things done. Knowing evil means knowing how to beat it, so you can use your sinister powers for good. Want more? Check out our*[*evil week tag page*](http://lifehacker.com/tag/evilweek)*.*

If you've seen the film [Inception](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1375666/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), you might think that planting an idea in someone's mind is a difficult thing to do. It's not. It's ridiculously easy and it's tough to avoid. We're going to take a look at some of the ways it can work.

Note: We've gotten a lot of emails about how to do this in specific situations. Although some of those situations have been legitimate, this post was written to teach you to detect these tactics or use them for positive reasons, rather than use them on others for selfish or nefarious purposes. If you want a good way to convince people to do what you want that doesn't involve the dark side of manipulation, [read this](http://lifehacker.com/5906546/how-can-i-be-more-convincing-and-get-anything-i-want) and [this](http://lifehacker.com/5869772/how-to-manipulate-people-to-do-what-you-want-without-abandoning-your-ethics).

**Reverse Psychology Actually Works**

Reverse psychology has become an enormous cliché. I think this peaked in 1995 with the release of the film [Jumanji](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113497/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). (If you've seen it and remember it, you know what I'm talking about.) The problem is that most people look at reverse psychology in a very simple way. For example, you'd say "I don't care if you want to go risk your life jumping out of a plane" to try and convince someone not to go skydiving. This isn't reverse psychology—it's passive-aggressive. So let's leave that all behind and [start from scratch](http://lifehacker.com/5953183/three-of-the-most-evil-ways-to-manipulate-people-into-doing-what-you-want).

If you're going to use logic reversals in your favor, you need to be subtle. Let's say you want your roommate to do the dishes because it's his or her turn. There's always this approach:

*"Hey, would you mind doing the dishes? It's your turn."*

But in this example we're assuming your roommate is lazy and the nice approach isn't going to get the job done. So what do you do? Something like this:

*"Hey, I've decided I don't want to do the dishes anymore and am just going to start buying disposable stuff. Is that cool with you? If you want to give me some money, I can pick up extras for you, too."*

What this does is present the crappy alternative to not doing the dishes without placing any blame. Rather than being preoccupied with an accusation, your roommate is left to only consider the alternative. This is how reverse psychology can be effective, so long as you say it like you mean it.

**Never Talk About the Idea—Talk Around It**

Getting someone to want to do something can be tough if you know they're not going to want to do it, so you need to make them believe it was their idea. This is a common instruction, especially for salespeople, but it's much easier said than done. You have to look at planting ideas in the same way you'd look at solving a mystery. Slowly but surely you offer the target a series of clues until the obvious conclusion is the one you want. The key is to be patient, because if you rush through your "clues" it will be obvious. If you take it slow, the idea will form naturally in their mind all by itself.EXPAND

Let's say you're trying to get your friend to eat healthier food. This is a good aim, but you've got a tough enemy: they're addicted to the Colonel and need a bucket of fried chicken at least once a day. Out of concern you tell them to eat healthier. They either think that's a good idea and then never do anything or just tell you to stop nagging them. For them to realize what they're doing to their body, they need to have an epiphany and you can make that happen by talking around the issue.

To do this you need to be very clever and very subtle, otherwise it will be obvious. You can't just say "oh, I read today that fried chicken is killing 10 million children in Arkansas every year" because that's a load of crap and comes with an incredibly obvious motivation for saying it.

If chicken is the target, you need to make chicken seem really unappealing. Next time you sneeze, make a joke about coming down with the avian flu. When you're ordering at a restaurant together, verbally convey your decision to order something other than chicken because you just learned how most chicken is processed by restaurants. When you've done enough of these things—and, again, with enough space between them so that it doesn't seem like odd behavior—you can start being a little more aggressive and stop going with your friend to get fried chicken. You can also take proactive steps to improve your own health and tell your friend 1) what you're doing, and 2) how well it's working for you. After a few weeks, if your friend hasn't decided to reconsider his or her position on frequent fried chicken, you can casually mention it and they should be much more open to having a real discussion.

**Undersell**

Underselling is probably one of the easiest and most effective ways to plant an idea in someone's mind. This is another version of reverse psychology but at a less aggressive level. Let's say you're trying to sell someone a hard drive. They could buy a 250GB, 500GB, or 1TB hard drive. You want to sell the largest hard drive possible because those cost more and mean more money for you. Your buyer is coming in with the idea that they want to spend the least money possible. You're not going to get very far by telling them they should spend more money when you know they don't want to. Instead, you need to cater to what they want: the cheap option. Here's a sample dialogue:

**Buyer**: Can you tell me about this 250GB hard drive? I want to make sure it will work for me.

**You**: What kind of computer do you have and what do you want to use it for?

**Buyer**: I have a 2-year old Windows laptop and I need it to store my photos. I have about 30GB of photos.

**You**: 250GB is definitely more than enough for just storing your photos, so as long as you don't have many more files you might want to put onto the drive it should be just fine for your needs.

This last sentence instills doubt in the buyer. You could even add "you'd only need a larger drive if you wanted to be absolutely sure you'll have enough space in the future" but that might be pushing it a little bit. The point is, if you appear to have their best interests at heart it can be easy to make them think they want to buy more from you.

Again, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that planting ideas in the minds of others is not necessarily a nice thing to do. Use this information to detect when someone's doing it to you and not necessarily as a guide to do it to somebody else for evil reasons.

**Do you think there are any ethical issues with any of these methods? Explain.**

**Give examples of how each method has been used on you or how you have used each on others. If you haven’t experienced a method, describe a hypothetical situation (unlike the examples listed) in which the method could be used.**

**Why is it important to know methods like these? How can they be used to accomplish good?**